Radical Grace and the Economy

Module VI. Denial of the Humble

This is *Section VI* of the broader workbook called
Radical Grace and the Economy

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Here's the first of 6 issues we'll discuss in this section:

Turned on its Head

The revolutionary stance of Christian origins.

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Issues

- *Flipping the Order*
  - ✓ Christ's people were the downtrodden, the oppressed and the marginalized — to whom he told us to give a clear preference. Indeed, he counsels flipping the order of social ranking. "The last shall be first and the first shall be last."
- *Flipping the Values*
  - ✓ Attributes valued and rewarded least in the world — meekness and humility — are the attributes valued most highly in God's Kingdom.

Discussion Questions

1. **Does anyone really believe** that the marginalized, those at the bottom, are the most deserving people? Is modern society not revolted by that suggestion?
2. **Should the social ranking really be flipped** completely? Would it work? What might be the first steps in that direction? How far can we take it?

Blaming the Marginalized

Those at the bottom should be honoured not marginalized.

Issues

- *Glorifying the Well-Endowed*
  - ✓ Conventional economics glorifies and empowers those who are privileged and endowed with material possessions.
- *Blaming the Poor*
  - ✓ It claims that the poor are the authors of their own demise by failing to utilize the resources of the free market to improve their lot.
- *Honouring the Marginalized*
  - ✓ An economy of grace recognizes that many of the marginalized and the broken are those who do not possess the grasping and aggressive nature often needed to thrive in the market arena – the ones whom Christ cherishes.

Discussion Questions

1. **Are the poor marginalized because they lack initiative** – or because they lack those qualities which would earn them a better return? Is there any rationale for saying they're marginalized due to their own fault? How would you discredit that argument?
2. **Why do some think that a grasping and aggressive nature is a virtue**, deserving of higher rewards? What personal qualities actually are deserving? Why are those qualities poorly rewarded?

Validating the Least of These

Turning the social order on its head.

Issues

- *Serving Those at the Bottom*
  - ✓ We are to give dignity to those at the bottom — respond to their needs and serve them — defend them physically and emotionally — alleviate their suffering and heal their wounds.
- *Elevating the Losers*
  - ✓ We are to elevate society's losers — the non-acquisitive personalities, the unemployable, the broken and the marginalized. We are to break the stigma of assistance and celebrate them rather than belittle them. They are children of God.

Discussion Questions

1. **In a society that looks down their noses at such people**, is this even possible? Where do we begin?
2. **Personally, is it a struggle for you** to warm up to broken people in the street? Does that mean you're failing to be compassionate?

Franciscan Noble Poverty

The Franciscan respect for poverty.

Issues

- *Embracing Poverty*
  - ✓ Francis of Assisi began his ministry by embracing a leper, following Christ's dictum with a fierce consistency. He embraced lowliness and poverty as a spiritual way of life — as a calling to express the longing for God's presence — as a blessing not a curse and a key to the mystery of Christ.
- *Practicing Simplicity*
  - ✓ Francis begged, but he did not demand that of everyone. Over time the principle emerged that Franciscans should practice a simplicity of life, ranging from frugality to outright poverty depending on the extent of their commitment.
- *Poverty is a Blessing*
  - ✓ This stands as a clear rejection of secular priorities which treat poverty as failure. Franciscans are quick to offer aid — to honour the poor. They not only heal, support, advocate and challenge — they identify with the poor and often embrace their poverty. Poverty is not failure — indeed it is a calling and a blessing.

Discussion Questions

1. **Why aren't all Franciscans asked to become beggars?** Is simplicity an adequate substitute for poverty? Or is it a cop out?
2. **How could Francis say** that poverty is a calling and a blessing?
3. **Can you see yourself** aspiring to poverty?

Indigenous Leadership from Below

The unacquisitive nature of indigenous culture.

Issues

- *They Know Poverty and Contempt*
  - ✓ Indigenous people, immersed in the history of colonization, are very sensitive to having poverty and disdain imposed upon them. They're appreciative of humble circumstances. Those who have not been broken by colonialism can resonate with those needing healing and support.
- *Disdain for Accumulation*
  - ✓ Pride of position and personal wealth are corruption and irresponsibility. The ideal leader is someone of humble stature — a spiritual person who is one with the Creator, the community and the land. Appropriation of personal wealth — the touchstone of settler culture — is a corruption of indigenous sensibilities.
- *Resonate with the Marginalized*
  - ✓ This vantage point better enables them to resonate with the marginalized and the hurting — through healing, supporting, advocating and challenging injustice — a natural expression of Franciscan values.

Discussion Questions

1. **Are pride of position and personal wealth** really corruption and irresponsibility?
2. **Are indigenous people just adapting** to their circumstances, or is there a higher calling in finding one's fulfillment in humble stature?
3. **Is it enough to empathize** with those needing healing and support without also identifying with them and standing with them?

The Call to Directed Action

Responding to the needs of those society has left out.

Issues

- *Not Enough to Give a Handout*
  - ✓ Standing with the marginalized requires more than just serving their needs when society won't. It calls us to give priority to ensuring that those at the bottom receive the resources they need to discern their calling and pursue their mission in life, leaving the well-endowed to stand in line for a change.
- *It Calls for Defending and Demanding*
  - ✓ It calls for defending their rights and demanding first consideration. It calls for redirecting resources, for establishing services and programmes, to address their needs. It calls for organizing and policy-making to give them access to resources. It calls for legal teeth put at the disposal of the oppressed and opportunities designed especially for the marginalized. It calls for demanding public responsibility, mobilizing organizations and funds and programmes in service of those at the bottom, defending the exploited and the abused, and pursuing justice.
- *It Calls for Taking a Stand*
  - ✓ Ultimately people of the spirit have to get involved also in policy change and structural change to strike at the root of power and privilege.

Discussion Questions

1. **How much do the marginalized need** in order to take their place in society, and how much do the well-endowed need to give up?
2. **If redirecting society's resources** toward human values and justice comes at the expense of economic growth — what kind of pushback can we expect? From whom?
3. **If redirecting society's resources** toward human values and justice comes at the expense of economic growth — are you on board with that?

This is Module VI. Denial of the Humble

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